Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District
14306 Park Avenue, Victorville, CA 92392
(760) 245-1661

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For further information contact:
Violette Roberts, Community Relations & Education Manager
Mojave Desert AQMD (760) 245-1661 ext. 6104

2003 TIES WITH 2001 FOR HIGH DESERT'S CLEANEST OZONE SEASON EVER

Victorville -- Despite smoke-laden air that shrouded High Desert skies during the last week of October, 2003 still managed to tie 2001 for the distinction of having the region's cleanest smog season in history, officials at the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District (MDAQMD) announced today.

During the 2003 ozone season – which spanned from May to October – only three days exceeded the federal .12 parts per million (ppm) one-hour ozone standard within the MDAQMD's boundaries, which encompass 20,000 square miles of the Mojave Desert, including the Victor Valley. 2001 was the last time just three exceedances were measured locally in any one year; in sharp contrast, 69 days exceeded the federal ozone standard in 1993.

District-wide, the highest ozone level recorded this summer was a .16 ppm measured in Hesperia on July 11. In 2002, the highest ozone level was a .15 ppm recorded in Phelan, while ten years ago – in 1993 – the District topped out at .20 ppm.

While this year's wildfires lead to significantly increased levels of particulates on October 29 and October 30, ozone levels on these days were only marginally affected. Moreover, cooler-than-normal High Desert temperatures between May and early July helped keep the formation of ozone – the primary component of smog - to a minimum in 2003.

The High Desert's 2003 ozone readings also compared favorably with those measured "down-the-hill" in the South Coast Air Basin (SoCAB): by November of 2003, 68 unhealthful days had been recorded within the SoCAB's boundaries, up from 45 days in 2002 and 36 in 2001. Windblown smog originating in the SoCAB – which includes the Los Angeles Basin, Orange County and the valley portion of San Bernardino County – is

the primary source of air pollution measured within the MDAQMD's boundaries.

While additional emission reductions from autos and other mobile sources will further reduce ozone levels in the years to come, air districts must take the lead in implementing creative new solutions for curbing pollution, according to Chuck Fryxell, Air Pollution Control Officer for the MDAQMD. Such strategies could include the establishment of a procedure for implementing interbasin emission credit transfers, whereby pollution reduction credits generated by companies located in upwind basins could be sold to companies located in downwind basins, which are adversely affected by transported smog. A procedure for implementing such a system "would provide a strong incentive for businesses in the upwind air basin to reduce their emissions, while paving the way for businesses to relocate in credit-hungry, downwind areas, such as the High Desert," stated Fryxell, adding that such a system would create a "win-win" air quality situation for air agencies such as the South Coast AQMD and the MDAQMD.

To learn more about the High Desert's air quality, call the MDAQMD at (760) 245-1661 or visit the MDAQMD online at www.mdaqmd.ca.gov.

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